

A SEA CHANGE.

THE day was an April one, full of light from the nearer leaves and the green mist of their assembling where woods are deep. All the atoms were in motion, and a harmony of swelling buds lay, ready to be guessed, under the rhythm of running water. A thousand little streams broke from the mountain, and played the game of follow-my-fancy

down the valleys and into the arms of the big water courses which knew all about it. Birds, in an ecstasy for nesting, juggled wildly with melodic phrases, and tried the trick of keeping three notes in the air at once ; sound grew into substance and dripped delight. The whole bare page of early spring lay illumined, like a delicate green window

with the sun upon it. Even Elephantis, the mountain, turned into a purple majesty cut out of air and fervent for the day.

In the little dark house under the very shadow of the mountain, on the side where firs grow close, there had been all the morning a clatter of brisk workmanship, the noise of mop and broom. Cynthia Miller was cleaning, with the passionate ardor of one who either loves her task or strides through it to some desired goal. Now she threw braided rugs out of the window upon the bank, pierced only lately by needles of new grass, and, pulling out a drawer from her bedroom bureau, carried it into the parlor to pick over. Such haste impelled her that she tried to do everything at once, and tripped herself up in the snare of her own eagerness. This was the last room to be set in order; to-morrow the house would be clean. Thinking that, she passed an unsteady hand over her forehead, smoothed out the rough hair above it, and sighed in extremity of desire. Standing there over the drawer, she abandoned herself to work again, with a speed so quickened that it seemed as if her hands darted and pounced in their assorting. Sometimes she held up an article to the light to note whether it needed darn or patch. Her frowning scrutiny looked like the hysteria of labor, neither supported by physical strength, nor clad in the armor of an enforced control. She had been pretty once, of a brown type with a flush under the skin and smooth, plump outlines. Now she looked a haggard sprite, old too soon: her eyes seeking some remedy for perplexing ills, and the intention of the piquant nose quite spoiled by two transverse wrinkles at the base. A lumbering step sounded in the kitchen, and she stood arrested, listening. The lines in her forehead multiplied; anxious care was enhanced by an added inscription of annoyance, anger even.

"Ain't you gone yet?" she muttered,

and then, as if some tormented spirit cried for its own relief and urged her on, "My soul! can't I have a minute's peace in this house?"

"Cynthy!" called her husband from the kitchen. The voice was dulled, not by intention, but the lack of it. "Cynthy, where be you?"

She stood as still as one of those little brown creatures on the trees, when they straighten themselves into twigs at the approach of other life. Her eyes narrowed. She looked not so much frightened as immovably perverse. If he wanted her, he should not have her, only because he wanted. Then he called again, and she heard his step coming her way. It sounded blundering, as it always did in the house: an inexact step not quite conscious whither it was bound, in these strange latitudes of wall and window, and better adapted to wide barns or the uncertainties of ploughed fields.

"Well," called Cynthia sharply from her trap, "what's wanted?"

At that instant he appeared in the doorway, and filled it with the effect of brawn and vigor. He was a son of the soil, made out of earth, and not many generations removed from that maternity. His thick hair and bristling brown beard gave his head a fictitious size, and his calm brown eyes showed only an honest and quite unconscious acquiescence in the lot of man. Even here, within four walls, the outdoor world claimed him for its own with crude assertiveness. Straws clung to him. Dark loam caked his furrowed boots, and the smell of animal life flew before him like a proclaiming aura. Cynthia could not look at him. She bent over the drawer and assorted swiftly, turning the clothes as if she sought a corner for hiding.

"Well," she repeated, with the same challenging sharpness, "what's wanted?"

But if her voice bore any new meaning that day, Timothy was deaf to it.

"I've greased my t'other pair o'

boots," he announced, in that throaty rumble calculated to leave the tongue an idle life. "I shall want 'em this afternoon, when I go down along, fencin'. I set 'em by the oven door. I thought I'd tell ye."

"Well."

"We might as well have dinner by 'leven. I want to make a long afternoon on't."

"I'll see to it."

Amply satisfied, he turned about and went plodding out of doors. She drew her breath sharply, and listened. Those steps had two meanings for her nowadays. When they approached, she shuddered, and her flesh crawled. At their withdrawal, she found it possible to keep half alive. But when she heard his guiding remarks addressed to the oxen, while the old cart went creaking out of the yard, at a measured pace, she gave way to an impulse likely to afford her infinite relief for the moment, even if it had to be repented. She flashed into the kitchen with the unerring step of the housewife made to carry domestic business through triumphant crises, and swooped down upon the heavy boots standing, redolent of grease, by the oven door. Her nervous hands fell upon them murderously, as if they represented a misery borne to the last gasp, and, taking them out into the yard, she threw them as far as her strength would serve.

"There!" said she, with a flash of obstinate malice, nodding at the mountain, "I've done so much. I wish I could throw 'em over you. I wonder what you'd say to that!" Then she went back again, and with some temporary composure addressed herself to work. A victory over the boots showed some tangible advancement; it promised more.

The mountain had made an intimate part of all Cynthia's married life. When she came up here from the plains to settle, it seemed to her, without much difficult thought on the matter, as if there

were something unlike other weddings in this pilgrimage uphill to live under the shadow of Elephantis. From her old home, sold now into the hands of strangers, it uplifted a mystical outline, to be grasped only in the clearest weather. Here it seemed to be a part of her freeholding. Then the attitude of the world unconsciously swayed her mind and roused in her the pride of place. Year after year, with the quickening of summer, crowds of people sought out Elephantis and grew volatile in wonder before its purple glories. In the winter, there were sometimes paragraphs in the local paper relative to daring ones who had "gone up" the season before, and the county was never tired of talking about the party which had got lost there and, straying into Dutchman's Gulf, suffered two nights of hunger and fear. All these dramas, inspired by an adventurous world, were played on the other side of the mountain: yet Cynthia felt them to be hers alone. It was her mountain; and for many years she studied its varying aspects under sun and snow, and even, one spring when her husband was logging, cut herself a little path through the bushes, fantastically hoping to reach the top, as we plan for what can never happen. But all this had belonged to her youth. She was forty years old now, and the mountain seemed too near. Yet still it remained the unmoved witness of her actions, a hateful censor as unyielding as if it had been appointed by God himself. She was bitterly angry with it, as she was with her husband; but in her anger against the mountain was mingled the alloy of fear.

When Timothy came home to dinner at eleven, there were no outer signs of homely tragedy. The house wore a beautiful order, and his boots stood by the oven door as he had left them, their toes pointing rigorously. A whirlwind of passion had swept them forth, and expediency, not in the least tempered by repentance, had brought them in again.

Cynthia's dinner table shone with care. The white cloth was ironed so smooth and glossy, the glasses gleamed so bright, that one looked about for the story of such serving,—to find it either in love, or in that dull habit made to break the spirit and drive women early to old age. Timothy was conscious of having a good dinner, but not so keenly as if he did not have one every day. Yet even to him the house wore an odd aspect of Sabbath calm.

"Got your spring cleanin' done?" he asked Cynthia, upon a mouthful of potato and fried apple. She nodded, sitting opposite him and not looking up, even when she passed him food and drink. Her own plate was bare, and she swallowed her strong tea thirstily and with a greedy purpose.

"I finished this forenoon," she said, and, without her wish, some exultation cried out in her voice. It had not seemed possible that desire could ripen so.

Timothy glanced at her from time to time. Usually he only looked at her as he did at the clock, when he wanted to know something; but now the restlessness in her atmosphere challenged and piqued him. So he became aware of her empty plate.

"You ain't eat a mouthful," he announced, in more wonder than concern, and Cynthia's forehead contracted a little closer.

"I'm more dry than hungry," she answered evasively; and he pushed the sausage nearer her, saying, with a neutral kindness which she had once known to be his equivalent for affection, "Help yourself!"

But she only shook her head and poured more tea. Presently he rose, took down his pipe from the mantel, lighted it luxuriously, and drew on his waiting boots,—the boots which could have told a story. When he held them up for scrutiny, Cynthia had a tempting toward hysterical laughter. She wondered what he would

say if he knew they had spent most of their morning lying out in the old cabbage bed. Then he poked his way out of the house, and presently she saw him striding off to the pasture whither he had drawn his fencing stuff that morning. She did not stay to do her dishes; other things were betiding. From the best bedroom she dragged out the hair trunk which had held her wedding things when she came up to live with the mountain, and tugged it through the shed to the barn, where she managed to lift it into the back of the wagon. She propped up the lid, and ran back into the house for the bundles of clothing which had lain ready for many days. So the trunk was packed, and the key triumphantly turned. Then Cynthia, breathless, but, she was sure, possessed of strength equivalent to all demands, led out old John, the horse of many summers, and harnessed him, praying Heaven the breeching might not have been shortened for Doll. John showed no wonderment while she threw a shawl over her calico dress and tied on her bonnet and veil. When she climbed into the wagon, he pricked his ears a little, but it was only as the whip fell upon him, going down the rough mountain road, that he betrayed any personal responsibility in the affair. A winter of oats and idleness had left him well equipped for one so far within the vale of years, and a remnant of his old spirit served him. So he put his feet down creditably, and Cynthia drove, looking neither upon field nor sky, and mindful of her road. The April day was dulling under a hue of gray, not rain, nor even mist. It was only a color come with the waxing hour, and full of sadness. It fitted her mood more closely than the bold radiance of morning; all the tender shades of loam and springing leaf seemed to fall in with her expectations, and show her how soon youth may be over. We do not need to formulate these things, and chant antiphonal responses of nature to the hu-

man mind. The heart perceives them, and as we live, we know.

All winter long she had not driven these eight miles down to the village where her errand lay. Once it had seemed a festival like the breaking of icy bonds ; but now, with all her thoughts turned inward upon one numbing point, she got what she could out of the horse, and thought only of time. The village stores were not for her that afternoon. She drove straight to the little station, and called the lank and introspective station master, loitering in idleness between his two trains a day.

"Here, you !" cried Cynthia, "should you jest as soon lift out this trunk ?"

No men folks being with her, of whom to exact the toll of a helping hand, he let down the tailpiece of the wagon and dragged her treasure forth, impersonally and with no concern. Cynthia wrinkled her brows.

"He need n't ha' slat it so," she murmured to herself, and then remembering that he must help her further, she smoothed her feelings and continued, "I ain't goin' to-day. Can't you keep it som'ers till to-morrer — till I come ?"

He shouldered it, still dumbly, and watching him to the door of the baggage room, she wondered whether it was well to trust an unknown man so far.

"You keep an eye on it," she besought him. "I'll be here to-morrer — not a day later."

But his heights of contemplation included nothing near, and she turned about under her first actual sense of the lions in an unfamiliar way.

Their homeward progress had to be longer, because it was over rising ground, and John could not be urged. Still, though it was late afternoon before they reached the little house, they were in time. The barn door was closed. Timothy had not appeared. When he did come, more of the toiling earth than ever after his hours of work, John was in the stall, and Cynthia stood at the sink wash-

ing dishes. The unique nature of her occupation at that hour in the day struck upon Timothy, as he came through for the milkpail. So methodical was their life that even so slight a deviation was like a heartbeat dropped, to be accounted for.

"Ain't you done your dinner dishes ?" he asked, in self-evident statement.

"I'm doin' 'em now," said Cynthia briefly.

"What d' ye wait for ?"

"I got hindered." He inquired no further, and when he came in again supper was ready, a delicate supper with hot biscuits and quince preserve. Cynthia was doing her duty artistically to the last.

That night she lay awake, and tried to keep her eyes from the window, where the mountain hung like a pall. Timothy was sleeping vocally, but even through that droning note she heard the beating of her heart. It seemed to shake the bed and her with it, like some terrible agent outside herself. She held her hand upon her breast, and tried to breathe serenely. But that grim quickstep gave her comfort, after all. She felt no need of forgiveness, but she told herself that when Timothy heard she had died of heart disease, he could not blame her for whatever she had done.

Next morning breakfast was early, and Cynthia, clearing it away, spoke but once, — to the mountain. She had kept her back to it as much as possible of late, but somehow it filled her vision all the more ; and now, when she went out to spread her dish towels on the brush, it grew and grew, as if it would engulf her.

"Why don't you get into the winder, if you want to ?" she inquired, scorning it at last. "I would, if I's you."

Very soon the kitchen, like the whole house, was beautifully in order, and Cynthia, her hair smooth and her pathetic little hands very red, had put on her best dress — an alpaca of great age and worth — and laid her bonnet and

shawl on the table. Then she stepped to the door and called to Timothy, chopping limbs at the pile : —

" You come in here. I want to speak to you."

He dropped his axe, and came, stepping a little more hastily than usual. But he was not used to being summoned.

" You cut you ? " he asked. " You fell ? "

She was standing near the kitchen table, one stark hand upon it. That and the rigid arm upheld her.

" There 's bread in the stone jar," said she. " I made three loaves, all I da'st, for fear 't would spile. I b'iled a leg o' bacon, an' the blue chist 's full o' mince pies. The 'taters are sprouted, all but what you set by to plant."

He stared at her in a wondering concern. She looked unfamiliar to him ; and then he felt a little relief, knowing why.

" You got on your best dress," said he.

Cynthia went on with the inventory of her preparations.

" The house 's as clean as a ribbin. I 've swop the cellar, too. I dunno what more I could ha' done."

" Why, no," agreed Timothy from his bewilderment. " I dunno what more ye could."

" An' now I 'm goin' down to sister Frances '."

He looked upon her as though she were demented.

" Not 'way down to Penrith ? "

" Yes."

" What for ? "

" To make 'em a visit." That did not seem to her a lie. He would know the rest later.

" How long you goin' to stay ? "

She hesitated. " I 'll let ye know," said she.

" When ye goin' ? " His eyes traveled from her black gown to the shabby little bonnet on the table, and he read his answer before her voice confirmed it.

" Now ! "

Timothy turned vaguely towards the door. " Well," said he, " I 'll harness up. You git out my t'other weskit."

" I 'm goin' now, now this instant !" cried Cynthia, stepping before him and reaching the door first. The folded shawl was on her arm. She tied her bonnet rapidly in speaking.

" How ye goin' to ge' down there to the railroad ? "

" I 'm goin' to walk."

" You wait a minute."

He went back into the sitting room, and Cynthia halted just outside the door, because she did not mean to leave her duty at loose ends. Obedience was owing him until she turned her back on him and on the mountain. Timothy had gone to find the broken-nosed teapot where their little store of money lay ; but at the cupboard his wits deserted him, and he took one of the sprigged china cups from its place, went to the kitchen sink and filled it from the pail. When he appeared at the door again, he was drinking the water, and Cynthia opened her lips to challenge the use of that china. But she shut them firmly. It was his china. He could do what he chose with it.

" That all ? " she asked.

Timothy came forward and mechanically putting out his hand, took up a dish towel from the brush. He wiped the cup with it, hard and fast. In both their minds rose a hasty simile that this stood for the housewifery he was thenceforth to do. She almost gave a little cry, for he had wiped off the delicate handle, and it fell at his feet. But Timothy was unconscious of it. Cups might easily fall when worlds were falling too.

" Well," said Cynthia, " I 'm goin' ." She turned about and walked away, her meagre back instinct with purpose. It was some seconds before her husband recovered his wits and voice ; but he did recover them.

" Here, you ! " he called. " You got any change ? "

She nodded, without turning. "I got my butter money!" she cried into the distance; and Timothy heard. Then she stepped the faster, and when the road dipped into shadow, took the side of it that would hide her soonest from his eyes.

The morning was still young and very full of grace. Flocks of blackbirds were flying over, grinding out their dissonant melody, more piquing to the lover of New England springs than any nightingale beside his rose. The world had burgeoned since yesterday. There was a miraculous gloss upon the leaves, a thought larger than they had been twenty-four hours before. The roadsides were lined with beauties Cynthia had known well in the first years of her married life, when wandering was not a burden: hardy lady's slipper in great patches, soon to be pink with puffy bloom, clintonia springing in polished green, and the clustering leaf of fringed polygala. All these things she knew by sight, though not by name, as she knew their happy haunts; yet she went along in haste, seeing the world, yet not seeing it, and wondering how she could ever have found the summer time so bright. Her eyes threw her the sheen and glory of things, but her dull brain made no record. Yet not because it failed to act, for thought was racing hotly, and she planned how she should meet her sister and tell why she had come. All winter long she had brooded upon that opening speech, but now the long catalogue had resolved itself into one last irritation, and she could only go thus far: —

"I can't live with him no longer. I'm goin' to support myself." Then Frances would ask why, and she would say, "He greases his boots so much. He leaves 'em by the oven door." That seemed to be all she could remember, and quite enough. Any woman would know.

Now, as her impatient feet went beating along the road, it grew to be incred-

ible that she had not seen Frances in all these years. Yet there had been reasons. She and Timothy never went from home, and Frances had her one child, deformed or sickly, Cynthia vaguely knew. But whatever the affliction was, it made a reason why the father and mother could not "go abroad," even to so near a port. Now, within two years, the child had died and they were free. Through her hours of walking, at the moment when she inquired for her friendly little trunk and found it safe, through the terrible railway journey with adventurers and worldly folk who would as soon pick your pocket as not, Cynthia was conscious of two things: that her heart was beating its way out of her body, and that she must tell Frances at once about Timothy's boots. Not a moment must be lost. She sat with her eyes closed, flying and jolting through an alien world. And when the train stopped at Penrith, in the warm dusk of evening, she was first upon the platform. The air tasted salt in her nostrils, and she noted through her desolation the tangible signs of an unfamiliar spot; it meant distance, freedom, and relief from fear. Fresh from her mountain solitude, the platform with its scattering loungers seemed to her tumultuous; all the men were tanned, and they talked in uncouth fashion quite unlike her own, and so amazing. She fastened upon one, because his beard was gray, and asked him chokingly, —

"Can you tell me where Captain Pritchard lives?"

"Goin' over?"

"Yes."

"Better take the 'commodation. Set ye right down at the door."

"How much do you charge?"

"Ten cents."

She nodded, and stood guard over her little trunk until he was ready to take it; then she followed it to the covered wagon. They jolted away into the darkness, and again she counted her pulse and thought

about Timothy's boots until they drew up at a house on what seemed a lonely road.

"Hullo the house!" whooped the graybeard. He shouldered the trunk, and Cynthia, before him at the door, found the knocker and beat a summons.

There was a gleam of coming light, and the door opened to a tall woman with peaceful eyes and smooth white hair.

"I'm all beat out," gasped Cynthia; and as she would have fallen, Frances set the lamp down with one motion, and caught her on the other arm. The boots were not mentioned.

Next morning, when Cynthia waked, she was lying in a soft bed, and the eastern light lay warm upon the coverlet. The chamber was not very large, and the roof sloped a little on one side. She lay looking idly at the paper, thinking that it was "sweet pretty," all over roses and buds. Presently there was a stir from a neighboring room, and Frances stood in the doorway, as welcoming and tall as she had stood in the outer one the night before. Cynthia gazed at her hungrily.

"Why," she said at last, "you ain't got a line in your face!"

Frances smiled and made some. She disappeared and came back with a tray of breakfast.

"Be I goin' to eat in bed?" asked Cynthia wonderingly. "I ain't so sick as that."

Frances smiled again, and patted her hand. Then she sugared the coffee in a motherly way, and coaxed her to drink. Cynthia believed she was not hungry, but she managed to eat a little; and after a while, Frances still sitting by her, she thought she would tell why she had come. But when she would have done it, her heart began beating, and beat so fast that it turned her sick. So she only said again, like a child, "I don't mean to make you trouble. You must n't do for me."

"You're all beat out," said Mrs.

Pritchard, recurring to Cynthia's own pathetic phrasing.

There was a long silence, Cynthia studying her own face meanwhile in the little glass over the mantel, and then coming back to her sister's.

"You're ten years older 'n I be," she said at last, in that same wondering voice. "You ain't got hardly a line in your face, an' only look at mine! How'd you know me?"

Quick tears sprang into the other woman's eyes. Her voice choked upon the words, "I knew mother's cameo pin."

Then Cynthia bethought her that, although there seemed to be a stir of passing in the road, the house was quiet. "Where's he?" she asked. "Cap'n Pritchard?"

"Gone clammin'. They have to go when the tide serves."

"If I tell you suthin', do you feel obleeged to tell him?"

"Not if it don't anyways concern him."

"Then — no, no, I can't tell it. You jest feel how my heart beats!"

Frances put her hand over the fluttering thing, and her eyes were troubled.

"I sent over for doctor," she said. "I guess that's his tread now. Doctor, that you?"

He came through the sitting room and up the narrow stairs. A head covered with thick white hair appeared in the doorway. The face befitting a jolly clergyman of many years ago, a hunting parson. Cynthia drew the sheet to her chin, and shook. Suddenly she was afraid, not so much of him, as of returning life. It had been easy enough, a moment ago, to die here in peace, at the heels of that runaway heart; but they were going to drag her to her feet again, and she felt tired. The doctor sat down beside the bed, and took her hand. He looked at it, the little red palm, seamed and wrinkled, and the crooked fingers beckoning for some obstinate good. Then he looked at her.

"How long have you lived up there by the mountain?" he asked.

Cynthia choked. She could not remember. It seemed far away, yet the later terror of it was flaming still in sight. "Some years," she said. "Years an' years."

"Been there all winter?"

"Yes."

"Had any company? Been away anywhere?"

She shook her head.

"Busy all day?"

"Most all."

"What at?"

"Doin' up the work. Sewin'."

The doctor nodded. Then he listened at her heart and tried her lungs, and nodded again. "There's nothing the matter with you," he said, "except you're tired out. Don't you get up out of that bed till I tell you to."

He went downstairs, Mrs. Pritchard following. Cynthia smiled bitterly to herself, and thought they would both find out some day. He was either a very poor doctor, or else he was deceiving her for a childish good. So she did get out of bed, and dropped on the floor in a miserable little heap; and there Frances found her, shaking and crying pitifully.

"I've got spinal trouble too," sobbed Cynthia, "besides my heart. I dunno what under the heavens you'll do with me. I've got to be a burden on somebody, now, as long as I live. Oh, I wisht I'd died on the way down!"

"O you dear creatur'!" cried Frances, and she lifted her into bed, and then sat there mothering her. Cynthia clung passionately to those enfolding arms; she cried harsh sobs which gave her bitter solace. Exhaustion came, and then she began to wonder a little over this human shelter where she felt so safe. Nobody had put warmly affectionate arms about her for a long time. Even her mother had not been used to wasteful caresses. They came of a stock

which lived and died quite properly. But this was all she could say, "Should you jest as soon keep hold o' me a minute more?"

"Dear creatur'!" said Frances again, and then she shook her head in a whimsical way, knowing how "shaller" she might seem in reasoning eyes. She too had a bed rock of reserve, a rock which had been smitten long ago.

"I dunno but I act kind o' silly," she said, "a woman o' my age; but I've got so used to babyin' little Cynth — we both did, cap'n an' me — that I can't feel as if I was doin' enough unless I ketch hold o' people somehow."

"Cynthia wa'n't well, was she?" ventured the other Cynthia.

"She wa'n't quite right, dear," said Frances tenderly. "There! I'll tell ye all about it some time. Now you take these drops. Doctor left 'em for ye."

All that day Cynthia slept, and was quite content; for in her brief wakings she always saw Frances, and remembered that the doctor said she was not to move. So there was no need of mentioning the boots, and making her heart beat again; because nothing could be done about them unless she were on her feet and able to talk to lawyers. And she should never be on her feet again. That night she looked up pitifully while Frances smoothed her down for the last time, and whispered, —

"Do you think I shall pass away before mornin'?"

"O you lamb of love!" murmured Frances, in the drone of a splendid bee over honey. "You ain't goin' to pass away at all; not from anything you've got now. Doctor says so."

"He thinks I'm spleeny; but I ain't," said Cynthia, with acquiescent solemnity. "I'm goin', an' I'm willin' to go; but he ain't no kind of a doctor, or he'd be the first to see it."

"Want I should stay right here in this room?"

Cynthia shook her head. Neverthe-

less she knew, all through that strange and dreamless night, that Frances was at hand.

For a week or more Cynthia lay between sleeping and waking, expectant of the end, and only mildly curious about the manner of its coming. When her heart beat hard, she felt a temporary fright because those wings of terror shook her so. The doctor came, and seeing, after the first time, how she shrank from him, would not have her told. Sometimes he stood behind the headboard, and looked down upon her. Often he placed a gentle hand upon her wrist; and always he had long talks with Frances, on his way out, and gave her counsel.

The Pritchards lived in a yellow, gambrel-roofed house on the great highway between Penrith and Brighton Sands. Penrith used to be a whaling port, and lies now in deserted honor, hands folded upon the majestic past. At Brighton Sands, visitors fill the air with laughter two months in the year, and go driving along the county road to explore dull Penrith, so quaint, so picturesque, and yet so to be eschewed in favor of box-like cottages and bare hotels. Penrith knows but two centres of action, itself and the Banks; and who would spend a browsing day there, making the tour of crooked streets, may chance to learn more than he likes to remember of widows keeping lookout still, and fishermen's children orphaned by the snatching sea. But the wide white highway to the Sands lies in the light of a later founding, and holds a brighter prospect than that upon the harbor and the outer blue. It has but one row of houses, facing toward the east; for on the other side runs by the river to its outlet at the Sands. The river has its tide, and it is a chance whether you would find it more companionable lapping the stone sea wall and pricked by tops of sedge, or withdrawn, leaving the sedges plentiful, green in summer and, through the autumn, chestnut brown. All the houses are held

by seafaring folk devoted now to 'long-shore industry, claming, eeling, and setting lobster pots; so when the tide serves, you see giants in sou'wester and oilskin, pushing out their boats, hoisting an ancient sail mellowed by weather, and gliding away into the east. Or they come creeping home again, and a fishy odor rises pleasantly. That same sea smell troubled Cynthia, used to the clear mountain air.

"Seems to me I smell suthin'," she remarked doubtfully, in her first moment of sane waking. "'T ain't nothin' b'ilin' over, is it?"

Mrs. Pritchard laughed till the tears came.

"It's all that gurry over by the clam-houses," she said, wiping her eyes. "I admire to smell it, but I'm so used to it 't ain't once in a dog's age I can. If ever I get a real good whiff, I feel as if I was made." Then she brought in a cup of clam broth, and Cynthia, privately thinking it "real poor stuff," sacrificed to hospitality and drank.

She lay there that afternoon high on her pillows, and surveyed the little room with some new interest.

"Frances," she said suddenly, "I don't know no more 'n the dead what's outside the house; I wisht I could just glimpse out o' that winder."

"Cap'n!" called Mrs. Pritchard, at the door, "cap'n, you come up here!"

"Oh, land!" breathed Cynthia, for in all these days she had not seen him, and it remained evident to her that, when they met, she must tell him things. He must be made to realize that although she had spinal trouble and heart disease, she did not mean to stay and be a burden on him. What she could do was not yet apparent; but there must be ways. So when a step came stealing up the stair, she lay with brighter cheeks and waited for him, feverishly. The captain came in like a conciliatory cat. He was very big, and tall enough to stoop under the slanting roof. He had

a good deal of yellow-gray beard and a proud aquiline nose ; his eyes were very calm and steady, in the way of eyes used to looking on blue water. Instead of speaking to Cynthia, he gave her a queer little oblique nod, and then turned to his wife for orders.

"I want to kind o' pull this bed 'round," said Frances, "so 't she can look out a spell."

The cap'n laid hold. He spoke but once, and then Cynthia marveled at his voice, soft and lingering like an unusual kind of purr.

"A leetle mite more to the no'theast," he counseled, pulling as Frances pushed. And the bed being turned, he disappeared with the same considered silence, as if it were a velvet habit worn to meet the world.

The window framed an exquisite picture, and beguiled the eye into far-reaching glimpses more bewildering still. There was the river ; Cynthia thought it was the sea. Beyond ran a shadowy line of land, with one white tower, and over the curdling water between, little sailboats were winging, and dories went back and forth unhurried.

"My, ain't it complete!" she breathed. "Well, I don't wonder folks carry on so over the beach."

"We think it's pretty nice," said Mrs. Pritchard sedately, yet with pride. "There's Fastnet Island, an' that's the light — revolvin'. I should n't wonder if you'd kind o' like to lay an' watch it a spell arter dark. Cynthia used to ; sometimes I'd hold her by the winder till she dropped off to sleep." An old sadness tinged her voice ; or, perhaps, not so much sadness as the sense of serious things.

Cynthia turned impulsively from her lookout.

"Yes, dear, yes," said Frances. "I've meant to tell you about her for quite a spell. It's real providential for me you took it into your head to come down here, for I dunno how I could ha' wrote

it, an' mebbe cap'n an' me never'd ha' got started for such a jaunt. Well, you see, dear, Cynthy wa'n't quite like other childern from the minute she was born. She did have suthin' the matter with her back, an' we thought that was all ; but doctor, he knew better. One day he told me. 'She ain't goin' to be like other childern, Mis' Pritchard,' says he. 'She don't take notice. I don't presume she ever will.'

Cynthia nodded. She kept her eyes on the river now, and either that outer paradise or the sorrow of life began to invade her eyes, and urge forth willing tears.

"She was a handsome little creatur'," said Frances proudly. "Hair like corn silk, an' skin as white an' pink as ever you see. She favored cap'n's family. The Pritchards are all light. Sometimes it did n't seem as if we'd be able to bring her up, she used to get so hurt. 'T wa'n't so much that she was ailin', but she seemed too kind o' delicate to stan' this kind of a world. Noises put her out, an' a cross look'd make her cry. Cap'n an' I'd been through a good deal 'fore we met one another, married late in life, so. He'd had a tempestuous kind of a time, an' you know I got 'most beat out with all the sickness we went through, 'fore the home was broke up. We set terribly by one another, but we had our failin's, an' sometimes I'd flare out an' he'd swear. When Cynthy come, that tried her 'most to death — I dunno why, when she did n't sense it — an' we sort o' quieted down, an' let everything go but her. I could n't begin to tell you the beautiful time we had with that child. I can't explain how it was, but she more 'n filled up our lives, an' yet we prized one another till it seemed as if 't was Beulah Land, an' all the promises come true. We had n't a thing to ask for, an' as soon as ever a shadder passed over her face, we'd seek about for suthin' to drive it away ; an' cap'n's voice would fall lower 'n' lower, an' he'd smile all

by himself to get into the habit on't. We took up singin' a little. That pleased her, an' we conjured up all the old tunes we knew. We ain't given that up, either, an' we ain't a-goin' to. We've laid it aside till you get your bearin's, but as soon as ever you can stan' it, we'll take our harps down off the willer, an' glad enough to do it, too. Perhaps you'll jine in. You used to sing the air."

Cynthia nodded again. The story gripped her heart; listening to it, she forgot her own past martyrdom.

Mrs. Pritchard went on, passing a hand over her eyes when a thought touched her too keenly.

"She was terrible cunnin', too, about the things she liked. There's one pinky kind of a shade in the water out there,—the west sort o' throws it over when there's a great sunset,—an' whenever she set eyes on that, she'd clap her hands an' laugh. An' she al'ays did see it when cap'n was to home, for he'd come in an' call: 'Quick,' he'd say, 'there's Cynthys red!' That's the reason, too, that cap'n give up goin' to the Banks. We talked it over pretty serious, him an' me, an' we concluded it wa'n't no kind of a resk for a man to take with a little creatur' like that missin' him if he's out o' the house an hour over time. 'Besides,' says cap'n, 'I should n't see nothin' but them eyes through the fog. It kind of undoes a man to be so called upon.' Well, so 't went on, an' we were proper well contented. The only thing that unstiddied us a little was suthin' doctor wanted we should do."

"Do you think he's much of a doctor?" interrupted Cynthia impulsively.

Mrs. Pritchard smiled.

"We think he is," she said quietly. "He's brought us through consid'able, fust an' last. Well, he said there were schools where them kind o' child'en could be helped, an' mebbe we'd find it our duty to send Cynthys off. It sort o' loomed up before us like a cloud in

the west, but it never had to be. Two year ago, doctor says, 'I guess you need n't worry about that no more. She ain't long for this life. An' come a year last December, she passed away. . . . I wish you could ha' seen her in her little bed. Never was anything like it on this earth. Cap'n could n't keep out o' the room. He'd set an' watch her jest like a waitin' dog.'

The quick tears sprang to Cynthia's eyes, but Frances, seeing them, smiled.

"Now you may know," she said, rousing herself, "how 't is you're a kind of a godsend to us. I could n't wish sickness to nobody, especially my own sister; but I can't tell ye how it warms me up to have suthin' helpless to do for. An' cap'n! first minute I told him you'd gi'n out, he says, 'Better keep pretty quiet, had n't I?' 'Yes,' says I. I see it pleased him; seemed like old times."

Then they held a long silence, Cynthia watching the changing wonder of the water, but thinking of other things.

"I wrote to Timothy last week," said Frances suddenly.

It seemed to Cynthia as if an inky cloud descended with the name. All her old trouble returned upon her, and she wondered if this might be the time to tell why she had come.

"Oh, I wish you had n't!" she moaned. "Did you say anything about my bein' sick?"

"No; I said you seemed tol'able tired with the journey, an' so I wrote for ye."

Cynthia had lost all the pretty color, born in her face only that afternoon. She spoke in gasps:—

"Frances, if I'd got suthin' to tell you, should you think I'd ought to do it now?"

"I should n't open my head about anything till I was up an' round, an' strong enough to do a week's washin'. Now you jest observe that little Pemberton imp, rowin' over to the bar. Them Pembertons were born web-footed." So they sat and watched the adventurer

until Cynthia was at ease again under the spell of common things.

But when Frances rose to go down and get supper, she stood smoothing her apron a moment before she said :—

" I'd be happy to have Timothy make us a visit, too. We both should ; cap'n an' I've often spoke on't. He's had a hard life up there, tryin' to wring a livin' out o' the rocks. Cap'n says 't is an unthankful land ; not like rowin' out overnight an' comin' in with your boat full to the brim."

" It's real green up there," responded Cynthia quickly. " Our land's richer 'n some."

" Timothy was a likely young feller when you was married. I s'pose he's changed, like the rest of us."

" Yes, I guess he's some changed." Cynthia closed her eyes, not so much in weariness, as to shut her thoughts away.

The bed was never turned again, for she was too fascinated by her window to forego an instant of it. There she lay, hour by hour, and watched the drama played by moving water : the ripples under a breeze, the miracle of the tide, with flooded or waving sedge, the sentient boats, the gulls. Then at dusk there was the light, gone and resurrected in a breath. As soon as she got used to cap'n, which really was the moment when he moved the bed, she hungered for him, childishly ; so every night he came up and sat on the stairs, because the room was small, and told stories or sang tunes. Frances helped him at both, and the wan little onlooker could see that they had much ado to show, in quiet ways, how much they loved each other. " I dunno's I've got a thing to wish for, now little Cynthys well on't," said the tranquil wife, " on'y, when our time comes, to have cap'n go fust. It's a terrible thing to think of a man left all alone."

The weeks went on, and Cynthia, lying there in bed, grew plump and pretty. Her hair took on a gloss from many

brushings, and with that mantling redness of the cheek, she looked the younger sister of her old sad self. Yet still care sat upon her breast, a double weight. There was the haunting spectre of her divorce ; but how could she get it now, a helpless invalid ? What was to be done with a woman felled by spinal trouble ? So she lay very still and tried to get well, not because life looked in the least desirable, but that she might rise up and take herself away from these kind souls.

One day in July, Frances came up the stairs laughing. Her sides shook, her face was crimson ; it seemed to be from no fictitious mirth.

" I'm possessed to do it !" she cried recklessly. " You know doctor said you was to lay abed as long as ever you could ? Well, cap'n's uptown, an' doctor's rode by to Brighton, an' I'm goin' to see if I can't git you downstairs to see my jell. It's all set out on the table, an' a beautiful sight, if I do say it."

Cynthia stared at her, aghast. " Why, you could n't no more git me down there ! You'd break your back, an' then where'd you be ? "

Frances seemed simply to put out her great arms, and Cynthia touched the floor.

" Oh my soul an' body ! " she cried, " you'll kill me ! you'll kill yourself ! Oh my soul ! "

Frances, puffing tempestuously, lifted her and bore her to the stairs. Cynthia thought she was carried all the way down, but she remembered afterwards the touch of the carpet on her feet. In some fashion or other, they accomplished the passage from sitting room to kitchen, and there Frances endowed her with stockings and a wrapper miraculously ready. Cynthia stood bewildered, and Mrs. Pritchard left her standing ; as for her, she seemed to have no eyes but for the table, red with jelly tumblers.

" Ain't that a handsome color ? " she asked hurriedly. " Seems if it jelled 'most as quick as it touched the glass.

I thought that was as pretty a sight as ever I see. O Cynth ! you jest peek in here. I've got the parlor cupboard all fixed to set it in, scalloped papers an' all. Yes, I don't wonder you observe the whatnot. That's some coral cap'n's father brought home, from 'the strand,' he used to say. I guess 't would tell tales if it could only speak." Mrs. Pritchard had always talked with great sedateness; now she chattered like a showman, bound to please. Cynthia stood by, wondering. "I declare," said Frances, at last, "if it ain't five o'clock! Cap'n won't be back 'fore dusk. What if you an' me should have an early bite, right off now?"

Cynthia, pushed out of the nest, felt a little hurt resistance rising in her. Yet pride sustained her, and she sat stiffly by, while Frances talked. It was more or less pleasant to watch the machinery of life going on once more, if only one were strong enough to bear it; but, she told herself, she was not strong. When the twilight came, she had grown tired, and, still a little sore within her mind, she crept upstairs alone, wondering and afraid to wonder.

Next morning, Mrs. Pritchard's voice came cheerfully from below: —

"Cynth, don't you be put out if I ain't round quite so early this mornin'. I've got a kind of a stitch in my side, an' breakfast'll be later 'n common."

"Oh my soul!" responded Cynthia. On the instant she was at the closet, searching for her clothes. "Don't you come up here with that heavy waiter. It's tendin' on me that's wore you out. I'd ought to be trounced." She dressed herself with eager fingers, and felt her way downstairs. Breakfast was nearly ready, and though Frances complained of her side, she seemed to bear it beautifully. In a couple of hours the stitch was all knitted up again.

But Cynthia did not go back to bed, and nobody seemed to wonder. When cap'n came, he only told her, in the soft-

est possible voice, about the good haul he had; and the doctor, stopping at the gate on his way home, called to her that he had something for her: bayberry and green beach plums. She'd better can up some of the plums, when they were ripe, to take home, and show the mountain what's what.

One August day Cynthia, in a calico gown and sunbonnet, her arms bare to the elbow, was considering the hollyhocks in the front yard. She thought they needed more foot room; so she got the spade and began an onslaught on the bordering turf. As she set her foot upon the spade, life rioted within her, and she sang, in breathless jerks: —

"There was a youth,
And a well-beloved youth" —

Hope and joy were stirring as the sap mantles upward in the spring, and for as plain a reason. She was well now, and the earth was hers again. If battles were to be fought, she could fight them. It need not be long before she left this refuge, and went out to earn her living in the world.

A man was halting at the open gate. He looked unfamiliar and yet, at sight of him, her flesh awoke under a strange responsive thrill. Her eyes fell upon his boots, furrowed with dust, and she thought of Timothy's. A little laugh broke from her at the shadow of those former fears; she felt a happy scorn of them.

"Is there anybody 'round here by the name of Pritchard?" asked the man; and Cynthia, throwing down her spade and tossing away her sunbonnet, ran out and hung upon him. Frances, at the window, saw the sight and turned away, with an aching throat. Cynthia seemed to her now not so much her sister, as a child, miraculously bestowed; yet she knew which road was best. Timothy put his arms about the clinging figure, knowing it to be his, and yet unaware of ever having owned anything so precious. She was like the angel of her

youth; he was afraid of her, she looked so pretty. She rubbed her face against his coat.

"Oh, how good it is!" she was sobbing wildly. "You smell jest like home. Oh, can't you kiss me?"

Timothy found he could, and liked the taste exceedingly.

"You've had your hair cut," laughed Cynthia, brushing her eyes with the back of a gritty hand. "An' your beard's trimmed. That's why I did n't know you."

Timothy looked self-conscious. Yet he held himself with some just pride.

"Well," he said, "I thought I'd have 'em thinned out a little, if I was goin' down among the quality."

Later that day, when the Pritchards were upstairs hunting for an old suit for Timothy to wear clamming, Cynthia came and perched upon his knee. She had seen her sister in that position relative to the cap'n, and found, with great surprise, that Timothy seemed to adapt himself to it quite cleverly.

"Is the mountain all purple?" she asked, from the keenness of her new home hunger, "an' mists runnin' over the side? Oh, seems if I could n't wait to see it! I dunno how I've lived till now."

"We could go straight back to-morrer," said Timothy, regarding her with his good brown eyes. She could not understand them. They were his eyes, indeed, yet they had never been so soft and shining. She shook her head.

"No, you've got to stay them two

weeks. I've had my change; I'm goin' to see to 't you have yours. An' company! I want Frances an' the cap'n should come up an' make us a nice long visit, an' find out we've got suthin' to show off on, too."

"Well," said Timothy slowly, "I told the Taylors I might come back right off, or it might be a fortnight. They're nice help to leave as ever you see. I told her to clean up the house as you'd like to have it, in case you went up along with me. Seemed one time as if you never meant to come home. Say, Cynthy, that wa'n't so when you went away, was it?"

Cynthia trembled a little. She glanced at his betraying eyes, and they were wet. He looked like an unreasoning creature which has suffered pain, and gained a lifetime at a bound.

"I meant to stay till I was good an' strong," she said firmly; and he believed her.

Announcing garments came flying down the stairs, and steps would follow. Cynthia, rising, paused for one hasty question: —

"Timothy, what'd you do with that little cup you broke, the mornin' I went away?"

He opened his mouth wide, in the horror of the careless steward.

"Hove it under the barn," he owned guiltily. "Had I ought to ha' kep' it?"

Cynthia laughed, with the tears coming. "No! no!" she cried. "I could n't ever bear to see it again. There they are — dear!"

Alice Brown.

